

# SAN MANUEL

BAND OF MISSION INDIANS

**For Immediate Release**

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San Manuel Fire Chief Michael J. Smith is congratulated by California's Acting State Fire Marshal Tonya Hoover for earning the California Chief Fire Officer Certification

## **TRIBAL FIRE DEPARTMENT CHIEF BECOMES FIRST OFFICER IN INDIAN COUNTRY CERTIFIED AS CHIEF FIRE OFFICER BY STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

***San Manuel Fire Chief Michael Smith Joins the Ranks of Fewer than 20 Fire Chiefs Following Confirmation by State Fire Marshal***

**San Manuel Indian Reservation (Near San Bernardino, Calif.) December 9, 2010**– San Manuel Fire Chief Michael J. Smith became the first head of an Indian nation's fire department to be certified as "California Chief Fire Officer" during a Thursday, December 9 ceremony conducted by the Acting California State Fire Marshal, Tonya Hoover. The achievement follows six years of course work and professional development that is a comprehensive measure of the applicant's education, experience, professional development, technical competencies, contributions to the

profession, and community involvement. Smith has become only the 19<sup>th</sup> Fire Chief from California of the more than 900 fire departments serving within the state to have earned this title.

The distinction was commemorated and celebrated as a shared milestone for San Manuel Chief Smith, San Manuel Fire, and the San Manuel Tribal Community. Chief Smith has led the department since its establishment in 2003 after being recruited to the tribe from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and manages its day-to-day response to emergencies both on and off the reservation. The 32 member department operates under a mutual aid agreement with surrounding jurisdictions, making it part of the broader emergency service response network in California.

“Today, I have an opportunity to recognize someone, who because of his service to CAL FIRE we still consider as one of our own, a colleague that has advanced the fire services by becoming the first tribal fire chief to earn this distinction,” said Acting State Fire Marshal, Tonya Hoover. “This certification is the culmination of many, many classes and a process of peer review that spans many years of hard work.”

In addition to evaluating the strategies and tactics employed in emergency services response the review committee gives added weight to the professional development efforts and community involvement of the candidate toward developing their respective department as a part of the professional and general community. Chief Smith is a member of numerous professional and distinguished organizations that work to develop the fire service capacity of Indian tribes across the nation including: National Fire Protection Association, President of the California Tribal Fire Chiefs Association and the National Native American Fire Chiefs Association.

“I see this certification as a validation for the years of hard work and development behind the growth of the San Manuel Fire Department which was established only a few short years ago, in 2003,” said San Manuel Fire Chief Michael J. Smith. “I wish to express my gratitude to the San Manuel community and its members for their support of the department’s professional development: This certification is a testament to the tribe’s vision to build a department that can meet the highest standards of the fire services.”

### **About the San Manuel Fire Department**

The San Manuel Fire Department's mandate is to provide emergency and non-emergency services to protect the lives and property of tribal citizens, employees, and guests of the San Manuel reservation as well as to safeguard environmental, cultural and economic resources.. Also critical in the San Manuel Fire Department's mission is to develop, implement and maintain innovative prevention programs and strategies, life saving and safety education and training to the San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians community. The department fosters partnerships with other tribal departments, as well as outside public safety agencies, to promote a dynamic emergency response capability.

The department operates from a state of the art fire station that has been in service since June 2004. This facility serves as the headquarters, training center and a firehouse and encompasses approximately 14,000 square feet. The San Manuel Fire Chief heads the department with 32 full-time employees including administrative staff.

**About the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians**

The San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians is a federally recognized American Indian tribe located near the city of Highland, Calif. The Serrano Indians are the indigenous people of the San Bernardino highlands, passes, valleys and mountains who share a common language and culture. The San Manuel reservation was established in 1891 and recognized as a sovereign nation with the right of self-government. Since time immemorial, the San Manuel tribal community has endured change and hardship. Amidst these challenges the tribe continued to maintain its unique form of governance. Like other governments it seeks to provide a better quality of life for its citizens by building infrastructure, maintaining civil services and promoting social, economic and cultural development. Today San Manuel tribal government oversees many governmental units including the departments of fire, public safety, education and environment.

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